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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with making current research in guidance more viable. Two suggestions are proposed: (1) there is a need to police manuscripts submitted to professional research journals for relevance and practicality; and (2) there is a need to involve school personnel, the practitioners in the field, in the planning, design, and conduct of viable research studies. Several impediments to this goal are noted, e.g., little internal and external pressure to change the status quo; the paucity of theories of organizations and of guidance mitigates against the building of a sound base for generating research; and organizational psychologists have not been much more successful in solving similar problems in their own field. Yet, the author is hopeful that a systems approach to research will serve to alter present priorities by: (1) mandating the necessity for a team effort; (2) maximizing the likelihood of producing usable results; (3) creating order among present diverse functions; (4) seeking ways to maximize benefits and minimize costs; and (5) by compelling guidance workers to operationalize their thinking and actions. Difficulties include prohibitive initial costs and systematizing the process and outcomes, a de-humanizing procedure in itself. (Author/TA)

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## ABSTRACT

Impediments to guidance research in the school setting are identified and considered. Changes in the practitioners role and function and the press for accountability are seen as influencing the direction and urgency of our research commitments. The trend toward a more integrative and operational approach to research is cited and its merits and hazards discussed.


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# RESEARCH IN GUIDANCE-SOME CURRENT ISSUES*

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## PROBLEMS

The survey and descriptive studies which continue to characterize the field, possess a very limited kind of usefulness. The difficulty with such studies is that they yield no information about cause and effect relationships, and fail totally to assess the quality or effectiveness of our services and programs.

This is illustrated best perhaps by a survey conducted by a former colleague of mine who ran a series of group counseling sessions for volunteering college freshmen who were on academic probation. Following completion of the sessions, my colleague reported that all (20 or so) of the participants were removed from academic probation. The attrition (flunk out) rate for those who failed to attend his sessions was in the order of 90%. My colleague was well aware of the meaninglessness of this statistic and despite efforts to convince his faculty colleagues otherwise, they came to regard him with a kind of awesome respect he never had before.

The point to this little anecdote is that it would appear that we are destined to be plagued with statistical nonsense of this kind for some time to come. Counselors find such studies easy to do, and the naive consumer continues to be impressed with such data (e.g., number of college placements, local test norms, counselor & counselee ratios, number of counselees seen, kinds and quantities of standardized tests on file, etc.).

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The more formal studies employing statistical analysis of data and experimental control-group designs possess an aura of respectability, especially if they're published, but appearances can be deceiving. Thorensen (1969) in an intriguing review of the status of research in the guidance and counseling literature says, "Most published research is a waste - a waste of valuable time and resources. The simple fact is that most studies as they are conceptualized, designed, executed and analyzed, make no difference to counseling theory and practice" (P. 263). Hosford & Briskin (1969) in a recent and exhaustive review of research in counseling, point to the irrelevancy of such studies for practice and conclude that "It may still be hard to refute Stefflre's (1963) contention that counselors might learn more about helping adolescents from reading Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye than from reading the latest counseling journals" (P. 203).

Published studies serve the needs of the author for recognition and status which is largely a function of the fact that such studies are conducted almost exclusively by university and college affiliated investigators. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the results of their efforts have little relevance for the elementary or secondary school counselor or guidance administrator who is "out there where the action is."

## SOLUTIONS

If research is going to be more viable, then at least two things will need to happen: the editorial boards of our professional research journals will need to do a better job of policing manuscripts, accepting only those articles which meet stringent criteria of

relevance and practicality; ways and means must be found for involving school personnel, practitioners-in-the field, in the planning, design and conduct of viable research studies. An elaboration of this latter point is warranted.

Staying loose: Thorensen (1969) underscores the need for "disciplined inquiry" in research, that is, rigorously and systematically asking insolent but important questions before beginning and after completing the study. Too often, the formal aspects of the study receive all of our attention and our thinking becomes sterile and routinized as a consequence. Thorensen's notion is laudable but despite his intentions is unnecessarily restrictive. One may argue for the need of a prior step, "undisciplined inquiry," i.e., training ourselves to become aware of the hunches we carry around in our heads, of verbalizing or rapping informally about them with our students and peers, then casually, impetuously, putting them to the empirical test. An incident drawn from the personal experience of the author may be helpful in demonstrating the importance of this preliminary step.

> I'm reminded of the time when as a full-time counselor in a junior college, I was reviewing the end-of-year records of my 200 or so assigned counselees. Approximately thirty of them had not been in to see me all year. On impulse, I recorded their names and took them with me to my weekly faculty team meeting. As counselor, I was assigned to a faculty team comprised of five instructors, each of whom had responsibility for one of the five courses offered as part of a general education core and all of whom had the same students in common. This arrangement enabled us to come to know our students quite intimately. I asked the team, without suggesting why, if they would be willing to free associate about each of the names on my list. They consented and I proceeded to record their succinct remarks on my sheet. Later I reviewed their comments and it struck me that they fell clearly into one of two categories: one having to do with social reticence, e.g., "he's quiet," "never speaks in class," "shy," "seems frightened," "I don't know who that is," etc., and the other with a motivational deficit of some kind,

e.g., "he's indifferent," "good-time Charlie," "cuts frequently," "never gets his work in on time," etc. I then decided to follow-up on my discovery by personally inviting each of my thirty recalcitrant clients to a group rapping session - hoping they would give expression to their perceptions of the guidance program and other concerns they had. In one sense, the group meeting was a disappointment, in another, it was a revelation: those who fell in the motivational deficit category failed to come, and those who fell in my social reticence category came but didn't say anything!! In effect, the group experience served as an informal cross-validation of my previous and very tenuous finding. My initially spontaneous hunch that there was something quite unique about this sub-group and that the very people who needed our services the most, were the least likely to seek them out, led me to my cursory and whimsical exploration of this feeling. Eventually, I pursued this finding in a more systematic and formal way, conducting and publishing a study (Brown & Calia, 1968) which helped inch us along in our understanding of how we as practitioners, can be more approachable and effective in reaching recalcitrant clients.

Broadening our base: As our role and function change, and change it must, our research activities will become more interesting and vital. This writer forecasts a trend, for example, in which counselors will continue to work primarily with youngsters in dyadic and small group relationships, while the guidance administrator will be committed increasingly to more systems (i.e., inter-school and school community) oriented interventions, working essentially as a human relations consultant with emphasis on team-building and organizational development efforts and third-party consultations. As a system-based, roaming consultant, the guidance administrator should be capable of coping with the interpersonal difficulties which plague the schools, viz., administration - teacher - parent - pupil relationships including racial dissension or dissension among any social unit in the school or system where the need for collaboration is essential.

As the guidance administrator expands the limits of his role and sense of community, his research responsibilities must change accordingly.

To be successful in this laboratory of community research, says Gellat (1968) the guidance administrator must develop new "security operations. He must give up much that he has come to value; the privacy of his office, the rigor of the laboratory, the publication criterion, and the protection of a defined role" (P. 145).

As the complexity of our responsibilities change (grow), it is increasingly evident that researching guidance means examining data involving human behavior, structure, technology and the context of the setting in which the program resides. The dynamic and interacting nature of these variables make difficult the identification of cause and effect connections. Isolating such variables for intensive study has proved counter-productive.

## OBSTACLES

Some impediments to guidance research include the following: (1) Until recently there has been little internal and external pressure to change the status quo; (2) establishing control groups in the schools is exceedingly difficult because the pressure is always "on" to have everyone share in the "benefits of the treatment experience"; (3) the experts-the organizational psychologists have not been much more successful in solving similar problems in their own field; (4) the paucity of theories of organizations and of guidance mitigates against the building of a sound base for generating research; (5) the very act of researching a program changes its essence and hence confounds the process and the results.

## TECHNOCRACY POINTS THE WAY

The trend toward "accountability" and performance contracting may serve to alter the guidance workers priorities. A development which could give some impetus to this change is a total impact (systems) approach to research, i. e., explicate goals, procedures, relevant variables and an integrating model, and apply model and assess outcomes. Cooley and Hummel (1969), Thorenson (1968) and Tiedeman (1968) discuss the intricacies and merits of this model and foresee its increased application in the school setting. Some of the niceties of such a scheme (systems approach) are that it (1) mandates the necessity for a team effort and avoids the pitfalls of isolated studies conducted by independent investigators; (2) maximizes the likelihood of producing results which are practical (usable); (3) helps create order among the diverse functions labeled "guidance"; (4) constantly seeks to find ways to maximize benefits and minimize costs; (5) compels us to operationalize our thinking and actions.

Some of the difficulties it presents are (1) initial costs of establishing such a scheme in the school are prohibitive without funding of some kind; (2) the focus of current projects have been restricted almost exclusively to career data-dissemination and the development of strategies for career decision-making; (3) that it makes the implicit assumption that man is essentially a cognitive-rational being--an old Parsonian notion which has been quite widely disclaimed and (4) systematizing the process and outcomes may ultimately be self-defeating since the very process of operationalizing such phenomena has the effect of

diminishing the humanistic essence of our services as well as the life choices and actions of our clients.

Our task in the future as "facilitators of human potential" will be to insure optimum utilization of the benefits of our technocratic society while safeguarding those qualities which make us unpredictably, interestingly, feelingly, infuriatingly, implausibly, irreplaceably, pricelessly human.

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